Bristol Bay Draft Assessment Key Messages

DRAFT—FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY -- **April 6, 2012**

TOPLINE MESSAGES

1. **SHARING A SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT**
   Over the last year, EPA compiled the best available science on the Bristol Bay Watershed. We are pleased to share this draft assessment for public comment and want to hear your feedback.

2. **POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF MINING IN BRISTOL BAY**
   The draft assessment concludes that the cumulative impacts of mining development come with pollution risks that could potentially diminish salmon runs.

3. **BRISTOL BAY SALMON AND ECOSYSTEM**
   Bristol Bay is home to one of the world's last remaining salmon strongholds, producing nearly half of the world's sockeye salmon, providing 11,000 jobs and is valued at $300-500 million dollars annually.

4. **TRIBAL AND COMMUNITY DEPENDANCE ON SALMON**
   Salmon are a lifeline for Bristol Bay native villages and residents because they are economically and culturally dependent on them.

5. **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND FEEDBACK**
   The next steps are to hear from you, consult with tribes and hear from the scientific peer review panel to make sure that our draft assessment is ~~accurate~~scientifically sound, unbiased and complete.

6. **WHAT COMES NEXT**
   The final assessment will help guide the agency on how to manage risks to Bristol Bay salmon. This draft assessment is a scientific document—not a regulatory decision.

1. SHARING A SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT

KEY MESSAGE: For the last year, EPA has worked to compile the best available science on the Bristol Bay Watershed. We are pleased to share this assessment for public comment and want to hear your feedback.

Supporting Points:

- EPA is charged with protecting the nation's streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands and drinking water.
- We have an obligation to protect this country's water resources from pollution.
- Clean water is a foundation for healthy communities, healthy economies, and a healthy nation.
- Our draft assessment is based on scientific findings. EPA used existing scientific research and collected traditional ecological knowledge.
- ~~This~~ EPA's activities related to Bristol Bay are~~is~~ about protecting the watershed – not ~~. It's not~~ about a single mine.
- EPA received requests from tribes and other stakeholders to take action to protect Bristol Bay under the Clean Water Act.
- We have a responsibility to give thoughtful, fact-based responses.

- We have a trust obligation to fulfill and government relationships to maintain with tribes.
- ~~The~~ EPA has authority under the Clean Water Act ~~gives us the authority~~ to conduct scientific studies.
- This draft document is a scientific assessment; when final, it ~~that~~ will inform future EPA decision-making in Bristol Bay. It is *not* a regulatory proposal or decision.
- Our draft assessment includes information compiled by EPA scientists and technical staff, as well as information gathered from federal agencies, including USGS, NOAA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

2. POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF MINING IN BRISTOL BAY

KEY MESSAGE: There is potential for a mining district to be developed in the Bristol Bay watershed, and ~~we found~~the draft assessment finds multiple risks from mining that could diminish salmon runs.

Supporting Points:

- Any large-scale mine footprint in the watersheds we studied could eliminate fish or fish habitat.
- There are 17 existing mining claims in the Bristol Bay watershed, including Pebble Mine, on land the state has designated for development.
- The draft assessment concludes that m**Mining operations could diminish salmon in the following ways:**
  - Acid mine drainage and copper from tailings could degrade water quality.
  - Mine pits and tailings storage facilities ~~could~~ have the potential to wipe out salmon habitat, streams and wetlands wherever they are placed and for some distance downstream.
  - Many miles of roads, running through critical salmon habitat, would be required to transport mine materials out of Bristol Bay. Runoff and road failure are serious risks.
  - Pipelines could run through habitat and re-direct water from salmon bearing waterways.
  - Natural disasters such as flooding and earthquakes could cause large-scale failures of tailings or pipelines, releasing tailings and destroying fish habitat, wetlands and waterways.
  - Based on records of historic and operating mines, failures would likely occur at some point.
  - Mine waste will need to be managed forever, even after mining ends.
- Although used as an example of potential mining, it is not EPA's intent that the mining scenario mirror what the Pebble Limited Partnership may eventually propose.
- Are there technologies or practices that will mitigate these impacts?

3. BRISTOL BAY SALMON AND ECOSYSTEM

KEY MESSAGE: Bristol Bay is home to one of the world's last remaining salmon strongholds.

Supporting Points:

- Bristol Bay is home to a world-class fishery.
- The Bristol Bay watershed supports production of all five species of Pacific salmon found in North America, **including almost half of the world's commercial sockeye salmon harvest.**
- The salmon are a cornerstone of the watershed's ecological strength and health.
- Clean water is critical for salmon survival.
- **KEY STATS:**
  - The salmon fishery provides at least 11,000 jobs.
  - Bristol Bay provides habitat for numerous animal species, including 35 fish species, more than 190 bird species and 40 terrestrial animal species.

    - Additional species of fish including rainbow trout, Arctic char, Arctic grayling, lake trout and Dolly Varden char also thrive in Bristol Bay.
    - The average annual run of sockeye salmon is approximately 37.5 million fish.
    - This sockeye salmon fishery is valued annually at about $114.7 million.
- The fishery and culture are strong because the environment is intact and pristine.
- Bristol Bay supports large carnivores such as brown bears, bald eagles, and gray wolves, and ungulates such as moose and caribou.
- Salmon are a critical source of sustenance for much of Bristol Bay's wildlife.
- The Bristol Bay watershed's sockeye salmon population is a combination of hundreds of distinct populations, each adapted to specific, localized environmental conditions.
- This diversity is key to the fishery's sustainability.
- Our draft assessment covers only the Nushagak and Kvichak watersheds because they are open for large-scale development.
- Pebble Limited Partnership (PLP) released only a summary of its data, which we used to the extent possible in our assessment. PLP declined to send actual data reports, which EPA needs to adequately analyze and use the findings.

4. TRIBAL AND COMMUNITY DEPENDANCE ON SALMON

KEY MESSAGE: Salmon are a lifeline for Bristol Bay native villages and residents because they are economically and culturally dependent on them.

Supporting Points:

- The Yup'ik and Dena'ina are part of the last intact, sustainable salmon-based cultures in the United States. They have depended on salmon for thousands of years.
- Up to 82 percent of the tribes' subsistence diet consists of salmon in Bristol Bay.
- Salmon are a major component of Bristol Bay residents' food supply. We've been asked to protect that resource.
- Life in Bristol Bay in inextricably linked to salmon.
- Alaska Native Villages are thriving, healthy and intact cultures.
- Salmon survival is critical for cultural survival.
- These cultures have a high reliance on salmon and other species for subsistence. They are very vulnerable to any losses of salmon or other species of fish or wildlife.
- An entire economy and set of services is built around the salmon fishery.
- Bristol Bay residents besides tribes and seasonal fishermen also depend on Bristol Bay salmon for their economic livelihoods.

5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND FEEDBACK

KEY MESSAGE: The next steps are to hear from you, consult with tribes and hear from the scientific peer review panel to make sure that our draft assessment is ~~accurate~~scientifically sound, unbiased and complete.

Supporting Points:

- Public engagement and transparency have been a priority from day one and will continue to be.
- EPA is looking forward to thoughtful, productive comments from the public and stakeholders.
- Scientific-based input will be especially valuable to us.
- To date, we have received over X THOUSAND emails asking EPA to protect Bristol Bay.

- Comments received from the public and peer review committee will be addressed by EPA in revising the draft assessment.
- Over the past year, we have met with federal, state and local governments; tribes and tribal corporations; industry representatives; members of Congress; and additional organizations.
- We have flown key EPA officials to Bristol Bay so they can see firsthand the landscape.
- We plan to have public meetings in Bristol Bay and Anchorage this summer.
- Public meetings are not the only way to comment—people can submit ~~them~~ comments online or send written comments.
- The public comment period runs from May 1, 2012, to June 30, 2012.

6. WHAT COMES NEXT

KEY MESSAGE: The final assessment will help guide the agency on how to manage risks to Bristol Bay salmon. This draft assessment is a scientific document—not a regulatory decision.

Supporting Points:

- This draft assessment is a scientific document—not an agency decision.
- Our goal for this draft assessment is to get the science~~it~~ right.
- We're still in the "listen and learn" part of our assessment. We want to hear what the public and stakeholders have to say.
- A scientific peer review panel, selected and managed by an independent contractor, will review the draft assessment and provide input.